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“Let us strive to deserve, as far as mortals may, the continued care of Divine Providence, trusting that, in future national emergencies, He will not fail to provide us the instruments of safety and security.”

Abraham Lincoln

Resources Provided for Schools and Churches Responding to COVID-19

As efforts are underway to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, schools and churches are making critical adjustments to ensure the health and safety of those in their ministries while also providing necessary services. As most schools are suddenly transforming their daily teaching methods, many educational companies are offering special discounts to aid them in the quick transition and also aid parents who are now more closely supervising their children’s education at home. The AACCS has provided [information](#) on their [website](#) about available programs for distance learning, including [online resources for at-home instruction](#) and recommendations for using [ZOOM and other online tools](#) for distance education. BJU Press and Abeka are offering discounted rates and increased availability for their online educational materials, including free [BJU Press teaching aids and lessons](#) and free lessons from Abeka’s online [ProTeach School Streaming](#). Several other online educational companies are also working to make their products more accessible; Lindsey Burke of the Heritage Foundation compiled a great list of [resources in a recent article](#) that notes the sudden shift to virtual and online education while communities strive to combat this crisis.

Churches also face unique challenges as they seek to continue ministering to their congregations while also limiting the scope of the virus. Facebook recently provided information to help churches with [virtual meetings](#), live [teaching opportunities](#), connection through [Facebook groups](#), and [online giving](#). Other organizations are helping church leaders navigate the temporary limitations on gatherings. Stand in the Gap radio program recently hosted a [discussion](#) with Jeremy Dyes, attorney for First Liberty Institute, in which he offered encouragement to church leaders from a legal perspective as they seek to follow government guidelines and also fulfill their God-given roles and responsibilities. First Liberty Institute has also provided [guidance to religious organizations](#) facing the coronavirus restrictions.

The Trump administration has also offered encouragement, in addition to the instructions on the [CDC coronavirus website](#) and the [15-day plan](#) from the White House. President Trump issued a [Presidential Proclamation](#) declaring last Sunday to be a National Day of Prayer for our country and all those affected by the coronavirus. In the proclamation, President Trump reminded Americans that “we must not cease asking God for added wisdom, comfort, and strength,” and also encouraged all “to remember that no problem is too big for God to handle,” referencing Luke 1:37. The proclamation also referenced other Scriptures which tell of God’s care (1 Peter 5:7) and God’s protection (Psalm 91:2). The proclamation closed, “As one Nation under God, we are greater than the hardships we face, and through prayer and acts of compassion and love, we will rise to this challenge and emerge stronger and more united than ever before.”

Florida Legislature Moves to Expand Tax Credit Scholarship Program

Last week, the Florida legislature passed a bill that [would increase school choice participation](#) in one state program fourfold. The bill would expand access to Family Empowerment Scholarships, which are currently available only to 0.25% of Florida's 2.85 million K–12 students, to a full 1% of school age children. The bill would also raise the income threshold for eligible families from 260% of the federal poverty level to 300% of the federal poverty level, including more middle-income families in the popular school choice program. Despite recent efforts by some Florida legislators to attack religious schools that participate in the program, the school choice expansion bill [easily passed](#) both the House and Senate without any amendments to curtail the rights of religious schools. Rep. Carlos Guillermo Smith (D-Orlando) pushed for an amendment to the bill that would force schools participating in the program to publicly disclose their enrollment policies, a reference to the many Christian schools that were targeted by the *Orlando Sentinel* for their biblical beliefs on human sexuality. Other legislators, however, like Rep. Kimberly Daniels (D-Jacksonville), [strongly supported](#) the bill. Rep. Daniels, who said she represents the community of “G-O-S-P-E-L, the Gospel of Jesus Christ,” called out the elitism of her fellow Democrats and challenged her colleagues, stating, “We cannot receive rights by taking the rights of others. In our being inclusive, we are being exclusive.” The bill heads to Gov. Ron DeSantis's desk, where it will likely become law.

Arizona Legislature Moves to Expand ESA Program Despite Opposition

Despite opposition, the Arizona Legislature [recently passed](#) a bill that would slightly expand the state's Empowerment Savings Accounts to more students. The bill would allow children living on Indian reservations to attend an out-of-state school within two miles of the Arizona border, allowing ten Navajo children to use the ESAs to attend a Christian school in neighboring New Mexico. The bill was met with [fierce opposition](#) by the anti-school choice group Save Our Schools, which successfully defeated a school choice expansion bill in 2018. The group now is trying to garner 237,000 signatures to get a measure on the ballot that would severely limit the scope of the program. The [initiative would mandate](#) that the state prioritize children with disabilities above other students who currently qualify for the ESA, including children and orphans of military families, children attending failing schools, children in foster care, and children living on Indian reservations. It would also prohibit students from using ESAs in other states, and it would cap the program at 1% of all public school students in the state, at around 11,000 students. The ESA currently has no limit on the number of participating students. According to Save Our Schools organizer [Dawn Penich-Thacker](#), the ballot initiative is necessary to “refocus on public schools” that already are underfunded; but American Federation for Children state director Steve Smith says that “if we truly want what's best for each individual student, then let the parents make that decision.”

In Case You Missed It:

[Weekly Market Update](#) provided by Jeff Beach of the [AACS Investment Team at Merrill Lynch](#)

[Communities Nationwide are Reclaiming their Right to Display “In God We Trust” Symbols](#)

[Religious Freedom Revolution](#)

[Lower Court Rules Against Coach Kennedy; First Liberty Plans to Appeal to Ninth Circuit Court](#)